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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the joint partnership between the rehabilitation professional and postsecondary academic institutions when serving clients with learning disabilities. Definitions of learning disability are explored as well as the types of evaluations used to determine if a learning disability exists. Assessment techniques are discussed. The variety of behavioral and psychosocial deficits which affect the ability of learning disabled persons to secure and maintain employment are described. The needs of the college student with a disability are indicated. The following recommendations for the involvement of the rehabilitation counselor are suggested: (1) provision of comprehensive assessment of the client's disability and its limitations; (2) assistance in integrating strengths and limitations in planning for maximizing vocational potential; (3) coordination with university personnel in providing appropriate support services; (4) provision of intensive counseling and follow-up services to assist in adjustment to the college environment; and (5) assistance in the provision of necessary aids, devices, and accommodations to facilitate academic success. (Author/ABL)

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REHABILITATION COUNSELORS AND POSTSECONDARY ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS: PARTNERS IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF LD COLLEGE STUDENTS

Paper presented at the 7th Annual National Rehabilitation Counselors Association's Professional Development Symposium, February, 1990.

by

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the joint partnership between the rehabilitation professional and postsecondary academic institutions when serving clients with learning disabilities. Definitions of learning disability are explored as well as the types of evaluations used to determine if a learning disability exists. The needs of the college student with a learning disability are indicated. Recommendations for the involvement of the rehabilitation counselor are suggested.

REHABILITATION COUNSELORS AND POSTSECONDARY ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS: PARTNERS IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LD COLLEGE STUDENT

For some persons, a learning disabled college student may appear to be a contradiction in terms, but for vocational rehabilitation counselors maximizing the potential of the learning disabled client may involve college training. The learning disabled college student can succeed in the college mileau with intervention from the vocational rehabilitation counselor.

Definitions of Learning Disability

Definitions of learning disability vary according to the source used as a reference. Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1988) indicated that most definitions of learning disability have 5 common elements: "(1) neurological dysfunction, (2) uneven growth pattern, (3) difficulty in academic and learning tasks, (4) discrepancy between achievement and potential, and (5) exclusion of other causes" (p. 309).

The working definition of specific learning disability in P.L. 94-142 is familiar to those who have been concerned with learning disabilities:

> Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include those who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (U.S. Office of Education, 1977, p. 42479).

The definition used by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) does not specify the exclusion of persons with environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. The diagnosis of learning disabilities according to the DSM III-R (1987) includes a category of specific developmental disorders that are "characterized by inadequate development of specific academic, language, speech, and motor skills and not demonstrable physical or neurological disorders . . ." (p. 39). The evaluation and diagnosis of learning disabilities have traditionally

involved identification of students with discrepancies between ability and achievement.

Assessment Techniques

The development of sources of information for completing a comprehensive evaluation include: (a) school records, (b) psychological/neuropsychological reports, (c) behavioral observations, (d) interviews with applicants and family members, (e) comprehensive vocational evaluation, and (f) neurological/medical records.

A battery of tests may be used, which generally includes an individual intelligence instrument, an achievement instrument, and various tests of motor functions. Gaddes (1985) suggests that the individual intelligence instrument chosen may be of the of the Wechsler instruments (WISC-R, WAIS-R), the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (KAB-C), or Ravens Progressive Matrices (Standard or Colored). The selection of the individual intelligence instrument depends upon the age of the client and whether any other conditions might impact on the validity of the score. The use of two instruments, like the Wechsler Scale and Ravens Matrices, may give a more complete picture of the functioning of the client.

A variety of instruments are used in evaluation of level of academic achievement. The Wide Range Achievement

Test-Revised (WRAT-R) has been used in many settings to classify level of mathematics and reading comprehension. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) is often used as a measure of receptive vocabulary. These instruments have the advantage of being inexpensive, easily administered, and quickly scored, but both give only limited information about academic level. Kaplan and Saccuzzo (1989) indicated that the WRAT-R gives only a rough estimate of academic achievement. The Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery (WJPED) is a useful battery providing tests of cognitive ability, achievement, interest level, and independent behavior. Other instruments that target specific academic skills, like reading and spelling, have been used to define level of academic functioning.

Neuropsychological batteries can be useful in the diagnosis of specific neurological dysfunctions. The Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery examines tactile, visual, and auditory deficits. Lewis and Lorion (1988) found that the Luria-Nebraska Neuropsychological Battery was useful in the identification of persons with learning disabilities. Numerous instruments are specifically designed to test tactile, visual, and auditory perception, as well as motor and psychomotor skills. A comprehensive evaluation is necessary, not only for determination of

eligibility for VR services, but to target the specific strengths and weaknesses that the learning disabled student may possess.

Learning Disabilities as More than Educational Disabilities

Learning disbilities are often thought of as only limiting academic functioning, primarily because the diagnosis of learning disability is usually made in an educational setting. Persons with learning disabilities, however, often present a variety of behavioral and psychosocial deficits that adversely affect their ability to secure and maintain employment (Zwerlein, Smith, & Diffley, 1984). Therefore, it is important that rehabilitation counselors provide comprehensive vocational assessment of persons with learning disabilities to identify the functional strengths and limitations that would affect vocational performance.

Many behavioral characteristics associated with learning disbilities have been identified which result in functional limitations affecting both academic and vocational performance (Vogel, 1985; Wren & Segal, 1985, Zwerlin, et al., 1984). Examples of these characteritics include: (a) easily distracted, which reduces job performance and concentration on academic tasks; (b)

inappropriate social skills, which results in difficulties in working in a group setting and problems with social acceptance by faculty and other students, and (c) difficulty following oral or written instructions, which results in requiring additional work supervision and problems in understanding and completing course assignments. Although not a comprehensive listing, these characteristics may cause both vocational and academic limitations that may be ameliorated with accommodation and modification.

Needs of College Students with Learning Disabilities

The needs of persons with learning disabilities in college settings are not unlike the needs of nondisabled students. For persons with learning disabilities, however, meeting these needs may be more challenging. These needs fall into several broad categories including: (a) gaining admission to a college or university, (b) choosing the right college, (c) selecting courses that will be taken, (d) adjusting socially, and (e) meeting career development needs.

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination against persons with disabilities by agencies and institutions receiving federal funds. Thus, persons with learning disabilities cannot be denied entry into colleges and universities provided that

they are otherwise qualified, which is usually defined by scores on college placement tests. For persons with learning disabilities, meeting established criteria for admission may be difficult (Vogel, 1982). Therefore, it is important to explore alternative methods of admission, such as provisional admission and special admission. Provisional admission allows students with learning disabilities who do not meet established criteria to enter college if they maintain a certain grade point average. Special admission allows these students to enter college if they can demonstrte a commitment to college training, usually through interviews with Office of Admissions personnel, college faculty members, and letters of recommendation from previous teachers.

Gaining entry into a college or university may not be beneficial to the student who has a learning disability unless the college also provides support services to facilitate successful integration. The rehabilitation counselor can assist the client in evaluating the appropriateness of colleges and universities which are being considered. Strichart and Mangrum (1985) and Michael (1987) discussed several areas that need to be considered when evaluating a college for a client with a learning disability. These areas include: (a) the availability of

counseling services; (b) access to support services, such as tutors and readers; (c) and modifications allowed by the college, such as extended time to complete course requirements, oral examinations, and untimed or double-timed examinations.

Choosing courses can be accomplished through coordination with student support services staff at the college. Patton and Polloway (1987), Minner and Prater (1984), and Stone (1985) described several factors to consider when assisting students with learning disabilities to choose courses. Some of these factors include: (a) scheduling courses to allow for maximum utilization of study time, (b) reviewing course content in regard to the client's strengths and limitations, (c) reviewing materials to be used in the course, and (d) investigating the experience of the the college's faculty in teaching students who have learning disabilities.

Deficits in social adjustment must also be addressed if students with learning disabilities are to be successful in college (Geib, Guzzardi, and Genova, 1981; Orzek, 1984; Rosenthal, 1985). Students with learning disabilities may have difficulty interpreting social cues which may result in social rejection. Peer support groups and individual counseling may be needed to assist the learning disabled

client to adjust to the social demands of college. Vocational rehabilitation counselors can either provide counseling directly to assist with social adjustment difficulties or can assist in arranging for this service as part of the student's Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP).

Students with learning disabilities may have special concerns related to their disabilities and may not have adequate knowledge of careers to make appropriate career decisions (Rosenthal, 1985). Furthermore, they may have negative self-perceptions which must be addressed if they are to make career plans which maximize their career potential. Assisting these students through the direct provision of career guidance and arranging for involvement in career development programs may be provided by the rehabilitaiton counselor.

Role of the Rehabilitation Counselor

As increasing numbers of persons with learning disabilities choose to attend college in preparation for employment, it is likely that rehabilitation counselors will become more involved with this population. Suggested roles of the rehabilitation counselor include:

a). to provide comprehensive assessment of the client's disability and its limitations,

b). to assist the client in integrating strengths and limitations in planning for maximizing vocational potential,

c). to coordinate with university personnel in providing appropriate support services,

d). to provide intensive counseling and follow-up services to assist in adjustment to the college environment, and

e). to assist in the the provision of necessary aids, devices, and accommodations to facilitate academic success.

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